



## Strategy for Support of the Interoperability Montana Communications Project By Dick Clark

### A Recent History of the Montana Wide Communications Interoperability

***The SIEC Vision of Interoperability Montana is that local, state, tribal, federal, multi- state regional, and international public safety responders have the capability to use seamless voice and data communications when responding to an incident or disaster.***

After every multi-jurisdictional incident such as Hurricane Katrina and 9/11 in New York City, the first item noted by “reviewers” was that public safety responders did not have interoperable communications, at any level, to seamlessly share voice and data with one another to coordinate their activities. The reasons for not having interoperable communications were: aging and incompatible equipment, limited and fractured funding, limited and fragmented planning, lack of coordination and cooperation, and limited and fragmented radio frequency spectrum.

To remedy the problem, the Department of Homeland Security, Science and Technology Directorate’s Office for Interoperability and Compatibility Program (OIC) published written guidance in the form of the SAFECOM Continuum for establishment of interoperable communications.

The SAFECOM Continuum establishes criteria for Federal Grant funding. Montana uses the SAFECOM Continuum as the standard for establishing and evaluating the progress of interoperable communications in Montana. To meet the SAFECOM guidelines, the Governor approved the Montana Homeland Security Strategic Plan (MHSSP) in which Interoperable Communications is the number two priority and established the Statewide Interoperability Executive Council (SIEC) by Executive Order.

SIEC’s mission is to assist the Interoperability Montana Project Directors Board (IMPD) to meet the requirements of the MHSSP by developing recommendations for legislation, developing information and funding streams from external sources, establishing interoperability communications standards and policies for Montana, and assessing the benefits of new communications technologies.

Interoperability Montana (IM), is a Montana-wide, standards based voice and data interoperable communication system designed to provide seamless voice and data communications to local, state, tribal, and federal public safety responders within Mon-

tana. The IMPD is composed of representatives of the eight voice and one mobile data consortium. Each consortium includes representatives of the local, state, tribal, and federal public safety responders within the region.

### **SIEC Vision and Mission to Support Interoperability Montana**

The SIEC Vision of Interoperability Montana is that local, state, tribal, federal, multi-state regional, and international public safety responders have the capability to use seamless voice and data communications when responding to an incident or disaster. The SIEC Mission is to assist the IMPD in their mission of creating Interoperability Montana (IM), a Montana-wide, communication system for all emergency response elements to protect the citizens of Montana and the United States within both SAFECOM guidance and the MHSSP objectives .

### **SIEC Strategy to Support Interoperability Montana**

SAFECOM Continuum guidance establishes the areas of governance, standard operating procedures, technology, training and exercises, and usage as inter-locking components of an architecture that is achievable to develop an optimum level of communications.

MSSHP objective number two directs the development of a statewide interoperable public safety radio communications plan that incorporates federal guidelines, deploy concept demonstration plans, and continue to plan, assist and implement public safety communications.

The previous SIEC Board concentrated on advancing MHSSP, in consonance with SAFECOM guidance, by focusing on governance, deploying concept demonstration plans, and assisting the implementation of public

safety communications. The SIEC has been reformatted and streamlined. The current board is composed of ten voting members representing local jurisdictions and ten non-voting members representing state agencies. The local jurisdiction representation is critical to the entire project because IM is a “grass roots” project. Among the voting members is the IMPD chairperson who is charged with presenting all requests for assistance to the SIEC board for approval

The current SIEC board continues to strengthen governance, and the implementation of public safety radio communications throughout Montana. In addition the current board is charged, by Executive Order, to develop parallel gateways to assist the IMPD. The SIEC requirement to assist the IMPD is greatly assisted by the fact that ten state agencies serve on the SIEC. During a SIEC meeting there is the capability of presentation of an IMPD issue and “instant” resolution based on an agency capability. While this is not a strategy, the “issue resolution capability” is very helpful. The deep seated SIEC strategy is to develop the status of “pilot program” for the IM network in Montana. This fulfills the charter of assisting the IMPD because it eliminates the yearly need to develop funding for what amounts to another portion of the network and would allow the IMPD to approach the development of the network as a complete system.

The completion of the overall SIEC strategy involves the creation and development of partnerships with local, state, tribal and federal agencies. These agencies contribute to the development of the overall network through their individual efforts which contributes to the “proof of concept” of the system allowing further development. The most striking success of the strategy of partnership development, to date, is with state and federal agencies.

At the local level SIEC support agencies have developed partnerships with the agen-

cies responsible for the development of lease agreements, infrastructure planning, and coverage areas. Additionally this has led to an extensive outreach program to educate the local jurisdictions on the full extent of IM.

At the state level, the SIEC, enhanced by gubernatorial efforts, was able to involve state agencies to complete an interoperable communications system assessment which further led to state agencies' active participation and assistance to the IMPD. As a result of these efforts the Department of Transportation, Department of Natural Resources & Conservation and Montana Highway Patrol have become full, participatory members of the IMPD. Additionally the Department of Military Affairs, Montana National Guard has contributed to the overall system with network design expertise and integration of infrastructure to build out the system. Additionally, the legislature has provided support to the IM network through apportionment of funding for infrastructure and build out of the IM network

At the tribal level partnerships have been developed for tribal specific communications sites and for interagency development of communications sites between the tribal and federal agencies. At the federal level there have been many successful examples of partnership development which have assisted the IMPD. At this time the Department of Interior has completed a Memorandum of Agreement with the State of Montana to provide an equal share, no cost, use of infrastructure and frequencies. To date this has resulted in the IM communication site lease being completed on a priority basis. Additionally, the Department has licensed federal frequencies for use by the IM system. Also at the federal level, the SIEC support agencies are working with the Department of Defense, National Guard Bureau to obtain interoperable public safety frequencies to assist in the build out of the system.

While these partnerships provide for the

additional build out of the system, just as importantly, there are partnerships which allow the IM project to closely coordinate with different agencies involved to insure mutual needs are satisfied without conflict. As an example the SIEC support agencies have developed a partnership with the Western Border Interoperability Working Group which involves local, state, tribal, federal, regional western states, and Canadian government agencies to develop a comprehensive interoperable communications network.

The SIEC and the support agencies continue to develop partnerships which will lead to implementation of a fully funded interoperable communications, pilot program in Montana that has the capability to provide seamless voice and data communications within Montana and will also be fully capable of integration of regional and international partners.

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